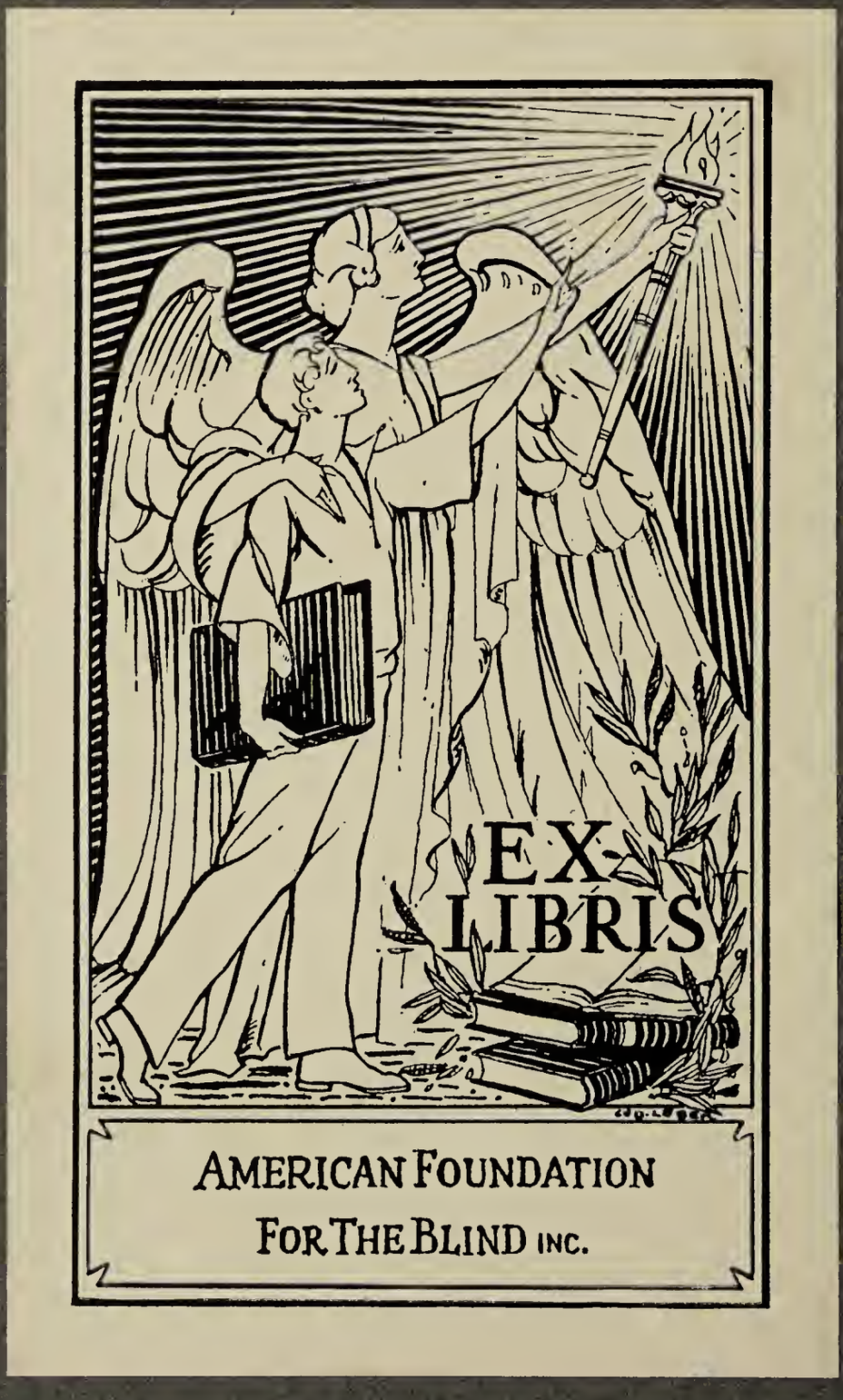
Mrs. Miller. A Study of Psychic Blindness.

Ellaine Elmore.

BF244
E64

1765. Elmore, E. Mrs. Miller: a study of psychic blindness. Psychoanal. Rev., 1936, 23, 395-403.-- This is a case of a woman who gave birth to a girl when her husband wanted a boy. She developed guilt feelings after the death of her husband; and the girl, as she grew up, built up a hatred of the mother. It was due to an identification and the hatred was a castration mechanism. In order to avoid "seeing" this the mother developed a psychic blindness. When the mechanisms involved were revealed to both mother and daughter there was a better adjustment, the hatred disappeared and the blindness cleared up.--L. S. Selling (Recorder's Court, Detroit).



15 WEST 16th STREET
NEW YORK, N. Y., 10011

MRS. MILLER. A STUDY OF PSYCHIC BLINDNESS

By Ellaine Elmore

NEW YORK CITY

Mr. Miller was a contractor, a well-to-do man of the merchant class. He was successful in his business, very fond of his home and his wife, and looking forward with eager anticipation to a son. Indeed, during the first three years of their marriage Mr. Miller had continuously reminded his wife that he not only wanted a son but felt that the son's arrival was a part of her responsibility to him.

Mrs. Miller was a good housewife, a pleasant neighbor, a kind friend. She made her home attractive for her husband, advancing his interests in every way she could. She cultivated his friends, entertained them at his pleasure, and made him always her first consideration. Indeed, except for the long delay in the arrival of the heir they were very happy.

But when the first baby did come, to the sorrow and regret of both Mr. Miller and his wife it was a little girl. The father suppressed his disappointment as best he could, and named the little girl "Marion," spelling it in the masculine fashion. But he nicknamed her "Son," and "Son" she was ever after to him. As soon as she was able to sit by his side in the car he took her about with him on his daily trips, where "Son" was soon known to his business associates. He made her his constant companion—his pal—and the two were inseparable.

Some two years later a boy was born. From the first the little fellow was weak and ill, dying after a few weeks. He had not been long enough with them for Mr. Miller to really feel his going. But he clung ever closer to Marion.

It was when Marion was four that her father died. Mr. Miller's passing was sudden and tragic. The family was bereft, indeed. Yet the break in the family group left no economic problem, for there was ample property and valuable securities to make Mrs. Miller and her little daughter more than comfortable for life.

Soon after her husband's death Mrs. Miller's eyes began to trouble her. From just a slight blurring at first, the dimness gradu-

BF244
E64
copy 2

ally grew, until she felt obliged to seek aid. And so began her pilgrimage from one oculist to another, each of whom made a different diagnosis. On only one point were they all agreed. They could find no organic trouble, apparently there was no organic cause; she just had "lost her sight."

During these weeks and months when her sight had been gradually failing Mrs. Miller had suffered much more than physical distress. For Marion had grown older day by day, and had finally reached the time when she entered school. This, of course, was to be expected, a condition which the mother could logically understand. But she was wholly unprepared for the sense of aloofness which seemed to remove Marion farther and farther away from her.

Marion did not seem like the same child. She had grown wilful, moody, and disobedient. Even during the primary grades she did not get on well in school. She was disdainful of her teachers and generally out of harmony with her whole environment. Her progress was marred by sullen brooding periods, erupting in violent tempests, as the seething heat of summer is disturbed by electric discharge. Her friendships, too, were spasmodic and tempestuous.

It was not until Marion was fourteen that she began a friendship with a boy a little older than herself—a friendship which continued without interruption for the four years of her high school life.

This sentimental attachment was particularly noticeable, first because it was the first association she had ever made which was not marred by frequent volcanic upheavals, and second because during these four years every day, and all day Sunday, the boy was to be found in the Miller home. Mrs. Miller did not object to the boy; she really liked him, in fact; but she got tired having him "always under foot," as she expressed it. On his part, there were never any expressions of tenderness nor any lovemaking. He was just always there. He was Marion's abject slave; he anticipated her slightest whim and humored her every wish.

As she grew older, Marion had grown constantly more exacting in her demands upon her mother. She disparaged the home Mr. Miller had so generously set as the family background; she disparaged her mother and all that had been done for her. She was imbued with the spirit of keeping up with the neighborhood; she craved luxury, making constant contrast of herself and those about her. Nothing was to her liking, and nothing satisfied her.

Mrs. Miller tried to humor all her whimsical fancies, spending her

energies and her income to this end. Marion accepted all of this as her bounden right, and the more that was done for her at home the more difficult she became in school.

Mrs. Miller was an ardent church woman, and had selected for Marion a denominational school of her own religious persuasion. She had felt that under such trained leadership she would absorb culture, as well as imbibe education. But Marion was a misfit there, too. In bitter terms she reviled the school authorities as she had abused the church leaders. Finally her antagonisms were so pronounced and outspoken, and she grew so impossible in her classes, it became necessary to withdraw her from the school.

Mrs. Miller decided to enroll her in a private school for girls, where she could have personal supervision. Up to that time the boy had been with her daily in her classes, but of course he could not follow her into a girls' school, and this marks the first partial break in their daily contact. However, he continued to go to her home to see her every day. And so, for four consecutive years, from the time that Marion was fourteen until she was eighteen, the boy was her constant and daily companion. Then they quarrelled and the break was final.

It was when Marion was eighteen that she entered college in a nearby city. It was then for the first time she realized the import of the break with the boy. This constant contact had given her comradeship and fellowship and understanding; but more than that, it had supplied her longing for constant humoring, the sort of anticipatory satisfaction her father had never failed to bestow. For the boy, of course, had been for her a father substitute; for her he had stood in the father's place; and when she broke with the boy it was as if she had lost her father for the second time.

Marion's college career was marked by a quick succession of love affairs, some lasting for two or three weeks, some being ended almost before they were begun. Like some gay butterfly, she gaily flitted from one situation into the next, from one affair to another—searching—searching always, for a father substitute to fill the place left vacant by the boy.

After about a year of this vain searching, much to the chagrin of Mrs. Miller, and against her wishes and advice, Marion married.

To rationalize her decision, she told herself that this marriage would take her farther and farther away from her mother, whom now she cordially and consciously hated. For the young man had been

offered a position in a far distant city, and although originally he had come from her own neighborhood, it seemed unlikely that he would ever live there again. This remoteness from her mother furnished reason for not seeing her often; she trusted to chance to make their meetings less and less frequent. More and more her mother was in need of loving companionship; less and less Marion desired to care for her in her affliction.

But the new job did not fulfill their expectations. Conditions which had never been the best changed completely, and after repeated shifting about Marion's young husband found that he was to be changed to another division. He was filled with consternation when he found that the "new location" was his old home town, the very town in which he and Marion had both been born and where Marion's mother still lived. Of course, he sensed in advance how distasteful this would be for Marion, although he could not anticipate the full depth of Marion's misery when she knew of the plan. But the fact of having to live in the town she loathed and despised was as nothing to the necessity of being near her mother. And this nearness was more drastically emphasized by the economic pressure which ensued.

The salary being very much reduced in this field of less opportunity, and the expenses remaining high, it was necessary for Marion to accept the hospitality of one of her mother's apartments. This galled her and humiliated her, but there was no other way out of it. She did not live with her mother, but she was compelled to live near her, and her spirit was sorely tried.

Now, since Marion's birth Mrs. Miller had experienced an accumulated sense of inferiority and failure. Even during her husband's life she felt she had failed in giving him the son he had craved for his firstborn. And later, when they did have a son, she had not been able to keep him. The intensity of this realization grew with the years. She not only loathed herself, she felt that her husband disdained and despised her. She grew to hate Marion because she had disappointed her father's fondest hopes, and she hated herself for the same reason. Mrs. Miller had recognized a very marked change in her husband's attitude after the birth of their first child, and a loosening of the ties which formerly had bound him to her and to their home. Mrs. Miller had sensed all this—it had been carried over to her in psychic waves. But she would not squarely face the situation; she did not want to see it. She had always believed in her husband. She preferred still to be blind to his shortcomings.

Neither did she want to see many of the personality traits which were developing in Marion. There were trends that she recognized as most unlovely—trends which she had scarcely expected and which she preferred not to see. So her eyes ceased to see. She buried all of these disturbing things in her unconscious. The things she did not want to see she did not see. Gradually her eyes grew less and less able to see. After a while it was almost impossible to see; she was nearly blind.

It was psychic blindness.

During these years hate had been crystallizing in these two hearts which should have been so warm and so tender towards each other. The mother hating the daughter, for, as she thought, disappointing her husband's hope; the girl hating her mother because her father was gone, there was no other to take his place, her husband had failed to assume this rôle—and because her mother was left. It was a hate, black, bitter, and acrid. It was as burned out ashes on the tongue.

In the meantime the change back to the old home town was most distasteful to Marion. Certainly she resented being near her mother, and more than that, she detested the dependence which forced her to accept her mother's protection and assistance. To her it was a tragedy to be near her mother, and to be constantly reminded of her needs; for Mrs. Miller had reached the place where it was necessary for someone to be in constant attendance upon her. She could have all the paid assistance she might require, but in her darkness she longed for some token of love and consideration.

In the night which had now descended upon her it was necessary for someone to hand her a drink of water, and walk with her through the house, and turn on the radio for her, and open the door when Jerry, her pet terrier, went in and out. She must be guided up to her room, and her clothes laid out for her and her bath arranged. She did not expect or desire Marion to do these trivial things, but she did so long for someone who, by the ties of love and personal feeling, might want to make her days a little less lonely and cut off from human meaning. In her conscious mind she believed that she wanted Marion to come in and out daily and cheer her. But her unconscious mind repelled the thought of having Marion near her, and the conflict waged on.

Marion, once again near her mother and sensitive to her constant privations, was consumed with a sense of guilt. She knew by any law of give and take that the least that might be expected of any daughter

was some show of friendly interest and regard, and she understood that, viewed purely from a commercial basis, the physical comforts she was enjoying merited some recognition to her mother. But a giant wall of separation had grown up between these two. The old Chinese wall, with all its vaunted strength, is merely gauze in restraining power as compared to a wall of hate.

Marion not only hated her mother, but now she hated her husband as well. The lukewarm affection of their early days could not stand against the trials and distresses that so soon overtook them. For certainly Tom Egan was not a success at his job. Probably with a different wife his own reactions might have been different. He was neither a success in his business affairs nor was he a willing slave, as the boy had been—as her father had been. He definitely and positively refused to be a father substitute.

After a while the baby came. Perhaps had this baby been a boy Marion's heart might have softened and her abhorrence have dissolved in some natural feeling. But little Betty, the first baby, was a girl, and to her was transferred the hate Marion had spent on her own mother for disappointing her adored father. Marion had become just a seething pool of hate: hate for her mother; hate for her husband; hate for her child. Naturally, she had no friends; nothing could make her happy.

Marion and Tom had long ceased to have any common interests. He played golf when he had the time; and if she cared to, she could ride out to the links and sit with Betty in the car while he entertained himself with his friends. It mattered little to him what she did, just so he was not bothered about it. The town sensed that the Miller home, once the meeting place for gay and genial friends, was now a spot of desolation. No one could fathom the cause, and no one dared intrude to offer assistance. It *was* a situation *that* WAS. It seemed that nothing could be done about it.

It was at this point in the family relationships that Mrs. Miller was brought by a friend for psychological aid. It was through her treatments, day by day, that the story was unravelled.

We know that every neurosis is the result of a psychic conflict. Mrs. Miller, over a period of years, had been examined by those who were authorities in the field of vision. She had been treated by some of them. On one point they were all agreed. They could find no organic difficulty. It was feasible, therefore, to give consideration to the psychic factors.

Mrs. Miller brought in her first dream, which was illuminating. It said: *"I am riding in the front seat of a carriage. Marion is sitting by me—a baby. I find it necessary to drive somewhere at a long distance—it seems to me to a cemetery. I beckon to Mr. Miller to take the reins. I take Marion on my lap to make room for her father; she cries violently. I shade her eyes with my hand to keep the sun out. Then I close my own eyes and put my hand over my eyelids."*

An entire volume might be written around this dream, which mirrors the conflict and gives the root of the neuroses. All nature is symbolic. The sun is the source of light—of truth. Mrs. Miller shades Marion's eyes because she does not want her to see. But that she herself may not see she closes her own eyes and places her hand over them. They were travelling a long way and far from the happy setting of their early married experiences. Mrs. Miller had turned over the controls to her husband, whose destination was uncertain and gloomy. She did not want to see where he was going, nor the way they were taking. She shut out all light, all warmth, all animation. She closed her eyes to life.

It was not until after Marion's arrival that Mrs. Miller sensed the need of holding her husband at her side—of their riding together. Up until then he had been a devoted husband, of whom nothing more could be desired. And at first Mrs. Miller was too occupied with the routine of daily living to note that her husband's whole attitude had changed. When this understanding began slowly to seep through her consciousness it raised many questions. And the answers to these questions seemed to point to herself. She must have failed him somehow, somewhere, if he no longer found pleasure in the comradeship of their home. If she had failed, how had she failed? Was she to blame? Since Marion's coming seemed to mark the line of separation between what had *once been* and *what* WAS, was Marion the source of her father's digressions?

All of these questions and many others vexed Mrs. Miller's waking hours and mirrored themselves in her dreams. That is, both consciously and unconsciously, she was continuously occupied with the reason for the changes in the home relationships. She finally concluded that it must be due to herself—to her own failures. For she had failed in the one big thing that had been asked of her, and that was for a son. The baby was fine and perfect and wholesome. But she was a girl. And Mr. Miller had asked her for a boy, and she had failed him.

Constantly she mulled over this situation until it became an agonizing conflict. The pain and the struggle was almost more than she could bear. She must hide from it somewhere, somehow. She would shut out all view of the way they were taking. She would shut out her husband and their little daughter. She would close her eyes to the whole scene.

It was through this very determination not to see the many growing faults of her husband—the disagreeable traits of the little girl—her own sense of failure—that Mrs. Miller arranged her sight so that she could not see. That is, she herself had induced her blindness. It was her retreat from the distressing uneasiness of mind—the grief and agony which was about to engulf her.

The first steps toward her cure were taken when Mrs. Miller began to unravel the tangled skeins of her past and to recognize her own conscious and unconscious conflicts. True to that tender, protecting mother instinct which was truly hers, she wanted help for Marion.

And at last Marion came for consultation, and step by step was led back over the long path to her childhood; her buried memories were brought up into consciousness.

Plato has said, "In life, all things occur." This great truth was borne home to Marion as we retraced the steps back to the days of her infancy. Slowly she began to understand how her childish attitudes were identifications with her father. She would treat her mother as he now was treating her. He hated his wife for his disappointment. She would identify with him in this hate attitude directed towards her mother.

Castration was indicated by her cutting herself off by hate. It was this repressed hate which had wrecked the happiness of her childhood and her youth, and now was about to wreck her motherhood and her marriage.

It is not the province of the consultant to make illuminating statements to the patient. It is the patient's prerogative to make discoveries about himself. Marion's new concepts disclosed changed attitudes through which it was possible to reach her husband. He was the outpost of her venomous loathings.

Tom Egan was an important factor in the family constellation. His coöperation and rehabilitation were necessary if there was to be adjustment and understanding in the group.

He was neither unimportant nor antagonistic; he was more than

willing, indeed, to try to work back to the beginnings of their dissonance, to interpret their meanings, and to make a new start.

As the pieces are put together, matched, and fitted into a puzzle, so little by little the actions and reactions of the Miller family were laid bare. Someone has said that understanding is love. I would say that understanding is power. For in the light of their knowledge of each other—their purposes, their intents and their goals—this once hostile family found the way to mutual regard.

Physical health comes with mental and spiritual poise. The calm of undisturbed serenity and security worked its healing, day by day. Mrs. Miller is seeing enough to read and sew a little. She can go about alone. Once again she is interested in her church and her friends. Her love for Marion and Marion's child has dissolved the ice mountain of hate which was freezing out their lives.

For Marion the long years of conflict and unhappiness are receding. She has sensed the triumph of motherhood; she knows its sorrows and its woes. Now she can understand her mother's bitter disillusionment; she can share in her griefs and her joys. Her own little daughter, in the light of her new wisdom, becomes for her a great opportunity, a delightful adventure in the art of living.

Tom Egan was never a bad man; he was just weak and human. When he thought others hated him, he gave out hate in full measure. Now that the sun of their regard shines upon him he flashes back beams of warmth and love.

Love and understanding have opened the way for this once tempest-torn family. It has given them release and freedom. It has opened for them the gateway into a new land of health and poise and power.

Now they can stand the sun—that symbol of truth, and light, and warmth, and animation. Now they are *alive*. They are FREE.

BF244 ELMORE, ELLAINE c. 2
E64 MRS. MILLER, A STUDY OF PSYCHIC BLINDNESS.

Date Due			

BF244 c. 2
E64 ELMORE, ELLAINE

AUTHOR

MRS. MILLER, A STUDY OF PSYCHIC

TITLE

BLINDNESS.

DATE DUE	BORROWER'S NAME

AMERICAN FOUNDATION FOR THE BLIND
15 WEST 16th STREET
NEW YORK, N.Y. 10011

PAMPHLET BINDERS

This is No. 1525

also carried in stock in the following sizes

	HIGH	WIDE	THICKNESS
1523	9 inches	7 inches	½ inch
1524	10 "	7 "	"
1525	9 "	6 "	"
1526	9¾ "	7⅛ "	"
1527	10½ inches	7⅜ inches	½ inch
1528	11 "	8 "	"
1529	12 "	10 "	"
1530	12 "	9⅛ "	"

Other sizes made to order.

MANUFACTURED BY
LIBRARY BUREAU
Division of REMINGTON RAND INC.
Library supplies of all kinds